

Minutes of the Palomar Mountain Planning Organization 2013 Annual Meeting

Saturday, May 25, 2013 at the Palomar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department

Board Members Present: Heather Beer, Glenn Borland, Robert Carlyle, Mike Chesney, Donna Dose, George Evangelou, Brenda Fromlath, Elizabeth Getzoff, Bruce Graves, George Lucia, Michael Pique, Linda Thorne, Yvonne Vaucher, Michael Walsh.

The annual general PMPO meeting was convened at the Palomar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department 11:04 A.M. Saturday May 25, 2013. In addition to the Board, about 40 members were present. The Chair, Michael Walsh, thanked Fire Chief George Lucia and Battalion Chief Cliff Kellogg of Palomar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department for hosting the Pancake Breakfast and Annual Meeting, Heather Beer and Susan Humason for organizing and producing the newsletter, Donna Dose and sister Pat for organizing the breakfast, and Bruce Graves and George Evangelou for meeting setup.

Secretary's Report (Michael Pique):

The minutes of the May 26, 2012, annual general meeting were distributed and approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report (Linda Thorne):

As reported in the PMPO spring 2013 annual newsletter, our balance carried forward from December 31, 2011, was \$40,274.77. Our 2012 expenses, totaling \$4913.05, were \$1014.86 for annual newsletter printing and postage, \$442.19 for breakfast food and supplies, \$400.00 for IRS compliance costs, \$56.00 for general expenses (post office box), and \$3000 donation to Palomar Mountain State Park. We received \$3720 in donations, we had \$347.25 receipts from the 2012 breakfast, \$260.00 revenue from 2012 newsletter advertising sales, and we earned interest of \$42.84, giving us an ending balance (Dec 31, 2012) of \$39,731.81. The treasurer's report was approved unanimously.

Palomar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department (PMVFD):

Fire Chief George Lucia reported the Department is alive and healthy, with a faster than two minute response: "Don't worry, we're here". All the staff are EMTs. The Department is working closely with the Fire Safe Council and Cal Fire. As a PMPO Board member and resident, he offers some background on what's been going on. The Fire Department Board is intent on transparency. The stage was set for forming the PMVFD in the early 1970's, when the California Department of Forestry (CDF) was the only protection, paid by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors. Later in the 1970's, the Supervisors withdrew the CDF contract, leaving no service (fire or emergency medical) for the rural communities, including Palomar Mountain. This triggered the formation of several volunteer fire departments. "We baked a lot of pies and held a lot of barbecues to build the autonomous group up here". This community owns this building, this land, and all this equipment: NONE of it belongs to the county. We grew through efforts of great Fire Boards and chiefs. Our equipment is up-to-date, our response never failed. Where do we go from here, how do we operate? The fire chief asks the community for help: climb ladders or fix computers, a whole team. In the past, we had a one-page application for membership, you passed a background check and a doctor's exam and were given a beeper and a mentor. You went out with the engine, learning how to help out. We've always depended on our community volunteers, especially on weekends. A recent example is the 2007 Poomacha fire: everybody said "what can we do to help?". Supervisor Bill Horn asked, after the Poomacha fire, how he could help. His answers led to the founding of the San Diego County Fire Authority. We started to see restrictions: first, on funding. It costs us \$100,000 per year to keep operating, covered by Prop L funds, taxes, donations, and the barbecue. The county master plan was revised based on the 2003-2007 fires. The city folk were threatened by rural-started fires. A grand jury blamed the rural fire departments, not Cal Fire, the Forest Service, or the city fire agencies. The fix for "disfunctional backwoods volunteer fire departments" was a \$27 million per year budget to take us over. The PMVFD won't get the "fire enhancement" money (\$30,000 in 2012) if we don't sign the current contract with San Diego County. This year the contract is 7 pages, and the spirit is that the county is in charge, we are not. Highlights of the restrictions are that the PMVFD must

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join the San Diego County Fire Authority (CFA), will create much more per-person paperwork, firefighters will receive a (taxable) stipend that's not declinable, record keeping is much tougher. Each member must be a certified EMT: "I can't hire any local community volunteers so I can't guarantee I can cover a fire up here". For example, in the Easter 2013 Crestline Road fire, response was widespread up here, with many volunteers. Under the county system, there would be only one or two people up here for 45 minutes until help came up the mountain. We need our community volunteers, the county says "no way". Also, we can't pick our own fire chief - the county will appoint someone.

Chief Lucia continued that he doesn't know there has to be a fight: the Fire Board could sign. Elsewhere in the USA, many volunteers work side-by-side with full-timers, but California does not allow this. Where can we put our trust, when fire protection isn't even in the county charter. What does the community want to do? Revise the contract? Could we follow Julian and Valley Center and become an independent Fire District? What will happen July 1 when the current contract expires? Will our radios be turned off if we don't sign?

David Robarts, Fire Board President, said that although much of the contract is standard boilerplate text, there are six major points of contention (the contract is on the Fire Department web site). We won't give in until the community has a chance to review the points. We want local control over our volunteer members' training and recruitment. We want to stay independent with our own patch and logo. We want authority to augment the CFA staffing with volunteers under the jurisdiction of the PMVFD Chief. Currently, we must use county staff and grandfathered volunteers. Typically, 50% of the time the county has refused to send staff up here, it's "not their responsibility". We want assurance that no personal protective gear or equipment owned by the department be forced to go off-site. Chief Lucia noted that in the old days, we controlled where our equipment went: since we are 45 minutes from help, we must have the right to keep equipment and people here to be safe. With the new contract, we can have everything here called away to Riverside County for a traffic collision. Also, if we sign the contract we can no longer apply for our own grants. The contract issues come down to staffing, purchasing, building permits, cooperation, and control.

Chiefs Lucia and Kellogg tried to start a discussion with the county in September with no response except "not within the scope of our vision". Now, we're up against a financial wall. The CSA 110 money from property taxes is about \$32,000; the Prop L Fire tax money about \$52,000. They offer us \$30,000 more if we sign the contract. So this year the threat is we lose all of our protection money, all \$108,000.

Susie Kellogg asked what we can do if we don't go along; what service can we provide even minimally. Chief Lucia said we did a 'Deployment Study' to investigate this. We need 7-8 people at a minimum. Under the county plan, our staff would be 2 people, one engine. Usually fresh out of the fire academy, they likely would not know the area and would be parked at the county road station on State Park Road. Could we depend on Cal Fire? No, they are not equipped or trained to fight house fires: they don't have appropriate hoses and ladders even. If we lose the PMVFD, our ISO insurance rating, now a 9 and almost reaching an 8, would go back up to a 10 (unprotected). Chief Kellogg says the Fire Board has only a small reserve fund. We could cut back to keeping only one engine operational, not three. We might manage costs of \$600 per person per year. We're much less expensive than an urban station. Only 20% of our response is residents, 80% is tourists. If we don't sign the contract, the CSA 110 and Prop L funds go away. We might get a little money from the building permit mitigation fees: Keith Roncetti, Fire Board member, says that if we don't sign, the County would sign with a contract with Cal Fire for minimal protection.

Elizabeth Getzoff asked if our contract options by the end of June are one of "sign, don't sign, send modifications". Chief Lucia says we will continue to negotiate and ask for extensions. David Robarts says one option is to sign for one year, not five, and then offer modifications.

Robert Carlyle asked what are the different kinds of fire departments in the county. Chief Lucia said Julian and Valley Center are independent fire districts. The county might not support us becoming a fire district. Could we go in with one of them? Maybe, but the deal would have to be good for both, and would require an election on both sides and a substantial cost no matter what.

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Brenda Fromlath said that Valley Center district was in trouble and may be taken over by San Pasqual.

Betsy Tainer asked if it would cost more to be part of the county system? Chief Lucia said "much more"; the media should be interested in how we do it so economically for \$100,000 per year, averaging 100 calls, when the county budget would be between 2 and 3 million dollars. Chief Kellogg asked whether the county would promise to keep the engine up here. Chief Lucia said they can't guarantee they would, as when the Cleveland National Forest engine crew leaves at 6 PM during the summer. Also, 90% of our calls are for emergency medical services; those would have to be served from the Rincon Reservation, about 45 minutes away.

Rosemary Johnston asked about options given by "FireForce1" consultant review. Isn't shutting off our radios draconian? Chief Lucia said it's a threat; "we do have our scanners; we'll find out you need help".

Michael Walsh asked for a show of hands of members who were happy with the way the Fire Department is today - response was very positive. Discussion of how fire protection could be paid for if county money is lost. Robert Carlyle figures \$100,000 per year divided by about 300 residents is \$300-\$350 per year per resident. George Evangelou asked how we could do dispatching? Perhaps Cal Fire, perhaps Heartland, perhaps Northcom (all about \$30 per call). Cecelia Borland asked: if we had a new tax, could the revenue stay here? David Roberts said yes, and we would strive for same level of service. Can we charge for medical calls and non-resident responses? Chief Lucia: yes, but some challenge to get reimbursement. Linda Fortney noted the Easter Crestline fire proved our capabilities for a better ISO rating (8A): we delivered 250 gallons per minute for 12 hours.

Next Saturday, June 1, an important Fire Board meeting will start at 8 AM, all urged to come.

2020 General Plan Update Report (Glenn Borland):

Glenn Borland said the update has been pretty quiet and stable this year, for our North Mountain area anyway.

Fire Safe Council and Tree Removal Program (Robert Carlyle):

Robert Carlyle said that the Fire Safe Council's goal is to make the mountain safer from fires by getting grants, clearing brush, and taking down dead trees. He has \$200,000 this year for this, call him at (760) 742-1891 if you need help.

Mutual Water Company (Linda Thorne):

The Mutual Water Company is getting along fine, even though the Pedley Valley well levels have declined this past year, because Palomar Mountain has lost so many residents the past few years. They may put a new tank or tanks along Crestline Road for fire protection.

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT): Greg van Idsinga

CERT participants help free up the volunteer fire-fighters for their difficult mission. CERT now has 30 members, including some at the Observatory. Planning joint PMVFD-CERT practice exercises for this summer. CERT needs more members; training is flexible, ask for details.

Community Center of Palomar Mountain (CCPM): John Lesac

John Lesac said the Community Center building is still being used as the Fire Department bunk house and kitchen. The Fire Department modular buildings are being used for community meetings such as the book club and church. They hope to get restrooms and a kitchen installed in the modular buildings in 2014-2015 so the Community Center building will be freed up for community activities, but no definite schedule. The \$50,000 house grant is in jeopardy for building code problems: the furnace and water heater are in the crawl space, which is not allowed.

La Jolla Indian Reservation Update (Elizabeth Getzoff):

Elizabeth Getzoff called LaVonne Peck, the tribe's project manager, who says that plans for the casino and the East Grade Road water project are moving forward. The casino has a new

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developer after various snags, and currently are waiting for money. The casino will not have a huge tower like Harrah's Rincon does. The East Grade Road well water project (on the former William Yale parcel) is hiring a new engineering firm to build the pipeline down to the reservation. The reservation also hopes to build a megawatt solar panel station but needs a partner.

The feral pigs are a problem on the reservation and also at Oak Knoll campground at the base of the South Grade Road. The gold spotted oak borer is being fought by forbidding importing firewood into the reservation campground: any brought in is wrapped in plastic and sent back out. The campground has been open since Easter but unfortunately not enough water for tubing. They are about to request a release from Lake Henshaw.

State Park (Michael Walsh): Michael Walsh said the Park was "open and adequately managed". The donations organized by the Friends of Palomar Mountain State Park have made a difference, with a three-year contract and the goal to bring the Park to break-even during that period. The \$109,000 raised is being used to advance several maintenance projects, install new doors and pipes, and to improve the visitor experience. Relevant web sites are <http://palomarsp.org> and <http://www.parks.ca.gov>.

Election of PMPO Board Members:

Doug Lande and Mike Stevens are leaving the Board. The incumbents who are up for re-election are Donna Dose, George Evangelou, Bruce Graves, and George Lucia. Nominations were received for four persons: Zachary Harris, Brett Michael Hauser, Burt Johnson, Rosemary Johnston. Each offered brief statements of their qualifications and viewpoints. Paper ballots ("vote for up to six") were distributed, collected, and counted. Donna Dose, George Evangelou, Bruce Graves, Rosemary Johnston, and George Lucia were elected to terms expiring in 2016. Zachary Harris was elected to the remainder of Mike Stevens' term expiring in 2015.

The 2013 Board roster is:

(terms expiring May 2014):

Heather Beer, Glenn/Cecelia Borland, Robert Carlyle, Elizabeth Getzoff/John Tainer, and Michael Walsh

(terms expiring May 2015):

Brenda Fromlath, Zachary Harris, Michael Pique, Linda Thorne, and Yvonne Vaucher

(terms expiring May 2016):

Donna Dose, George Evangelou, Bruce Graves, Rosemary Johnston, and George Lucia

Tom Burton complimented Michael Walsh for his crisp handling of the annual meeting and of affairs of the mountain. The meeting was adjourned at 1:20 PM.

Michael E. Pique, Secretary. secretary@PMPOinfo.com Minutes approved by PMPO membership May 24, 2014.